DC
ATARI FORCE
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ATARI FORCE

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FIVE BRAVE *EXPLORERS*, WANDERING THE MANY DIMENSIONS OF *THE MULTIVERSE*, SEEKING A *NEW HOME* FOR EARTH'S WAR-WEARY *MILLIONS*: LED BY *COMMANDER MARTIN CHAMPION*, THEY ARE THE--

ATARI FORCE™

--AND *THIS* IS THE STORY OF THEIR *FINAL MISSION!*

ANOTHER USELESS PLANET, CHAMPION! HOW MANY DOES THIS MAKE--

TWELVE?

MAYBE WE'LL FIND WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR *NEXT TIME*, PEREZ.

YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY--

GALAXIAN

"LUCKY THIRTEEN?"

GOOD LORD, PEREZ! THIS RIDGE WE'VE BEEN STANDING ON--

--IT ISN'T A RIDGE! IT'S ALIVE!

BLAM

BLAAM

AND I THINK IT WANTS US FOR DINNER!

AARGH

ABOARD THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL DRIVE RESEARCH SHIP, *SCANNER ONE*...

TROUBLE, LI SAN!

APPARENTLY THIS OLD MOON ISN'T AS *LIFELESS* AS WE THOUGHT!

I'LL BREAK OUT THE *LASER CANNON*--!

NO! WHAT *RIGHT* DO WE HAVE TO *HARM* THAT CREATURE?

THIS IS *ITS* WORLD-- *WE'RE* THE *INTRUDERS*!

NOBLE *SENTIMENTS*, DOCTOR ORION...

BUT I'M SURE THEY'LL BE OF LITTLE *COMFORT* TO OUR *FRIENDS* IF THAT THING *CATCHES* THEM--!

SINGH! HUKKA! GET BACK TO THE SHIP!

PREPARE FOR EMERGENCY LIFT-OFF!

AYE-AYE, COMMANDER!

THAT'S ONE ORDER YOU DON'T HAVE TO GIVE TWICE!

HUKKA-HUKKA! RUUN!

CLOSER THAN YOU THINK, COMMANDER...!

HUKKA! SEENGH--?

BLAST!

EVEN WITH OUR JET-PACKS, WE'RE TOO SLOW!

IT'S GOING TO BE CLOSE--!

JET-PACK MISFIRING! I'M LOSING MY BALANCE--

--GOING TO--

UNNH!

SINGH IS DOWN!

GET UP, MOHANDAS! FOR THE LOVE OF MERCY--!

MOHANDAS!

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOUR SURVIVAL SUIT--?

JET-PACK OUT OF COMMISSION, COMMANDER!

AND I'M AFRAID--I'VE TWISTED MY LEG--!

ARROHHHRRR

BLAM!

ROWRR

IT'S UP TO YOU, LYDIA!

CAN YOU GET SINGH BACK TO SCANNER ONE?

WITH THIS WORLDLET'S LOW GRAVITY, NO PROBLEM!

BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU--?

ZAM!

I CAN HANDLE MYSELF, LYDIA!

WE WANTED TO AVOID A SHOWDOWN--

BLAM

--BECAUSE WE'RE THE ONES WHO DON'T BELONG HERE!

ZAAM!

BUT NOW, I DON'T HAVE A CHOICE!

AND IF IT'S A QUESTION OF OUR LIVES--OR THIS CREATURE'S--

--I VOTE FOR US!

BA-BOOM!

AT SCANNER ONE...

THE MEDI-PROBES WILL TAKE OVER NOW, PEREZ.

WHERE'S MARTIN?

I--I DON'T KNOW, LUCAS.

HE STAYED BEHIND TO COVER US--

AND I'M STILL BEHIND YOU, LYDIA!

MARTIN!

THANK HEAVEN, YOU MADE IT--!

WE'RE NOT HOME FREE YET, LYDIA!

O'ROURKE, ARE YOU AT THE CONTROLS?

I AM, COMMANDER!

LOCK ALL HATCHES AS SOON AS I GET ABOARD --HURRY!

CONTROL ROOM, TEN SECONDS LATER...

TAKE US UP, O'ROURKE-- MOVE!

YES, SIR!

I THOUGHT YOU DESTROYED THE CREATURE--?

I DID, O'ROURKE--

VROOM!

KRAKOOM

--AND I'M AFRAID THAT MADE IT'S MOTHER PRETTY MAD!

ACTIVATING MULTIVERSE HYPER-DRIVE, COMMANDER!

WE'RE ON OUR WAY!

GOOD WORK, O'ROURKE!

MASTER PILOT PEREZ, TAKE OVER!

AND, EVEN THOUGH THEY'VE WITNESSED THIS SPECTACLE A DOZEN TIMES BEFORE, THEY FIND THEIR BREATH CATCHING IN THEIR THROATS--

--AS THE SHIP'S VIEWSCREEN SHOWS A SIGHT FEW HUMANS HAVE SEEN THE SPACE-BETWEEN-SPACE THAT IS THE MULTIVERSE!

SO WE'VE FAILED-- AGAIN!

I'M BEGINNING TO BELIEVE WE'LL NEVER FIND AN EARTH-LIKE WORLD--

--NO MATTER HOW MANY PARALLEL TIME-LINES WE TRAVEL TO!

GIVE IT TIME, LYDIA..

I'VE GIVEN IT ALL THE TIME I CAN, COMMANDER

I JUST--DON'T BELIEVE ANYMORE.

IT'S HOPELESS..

HOPELESS.

WE'RE ALL DISAPPOINTED, O'ROURKE.

TO USE YOUR OWN WORDS, MARTIN, GIVE HER TIME.

SHE'S UPSET.

THIS "ADVENTURE" HASN'T TURNED OUT AS WE EXPECTED.

BUT LYDIA PEREZ SEEMS TO BE CARRYING A SPECIAL BURDEN OF HER OWN.

YEARS AGO, BEFORE THE WAR, WE WERE FRIENDS. BUT SINCE WE STARTED THIS MISSION, SHE'S BEEN COLD AS ICE.

LOOK OUT THERE, MARTIN.

THE MULTIVERSE-- AN INFINITY OF ALTERNATE REALITIES-- WORLDS AND UNIVERSES WHOSE HISTORY DIFFERS FROM OUR OWN.

BUT, AS COMPLICATED AS IT IS--

--IT'S SIMPLICITY ITSELF COMPARED TO THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE HUMAN SOUL.

AND COMING FROM SOMEONE WHO HAD A CHINESE MOTHER AND AN IRISH FATHER, YOU KNOW THAT'S AS CLOSE TO TRUTH AS YOU CAN GET!

I ONLY WISH LYDIA WOULD TALK TO ME, LI SAN.

THEN, PERHAPS, I COULD UNDERSTAND..

TIME:

IN THE MULTIVERSE, MORE THAN ANYWHERE, TIME IS RELATIVE--

--BUT FOR MASTER PILOT LYDIA PEREZ, ALONE IN HER CABIN, TIME SEEMS TO DRAG ESPECIALLY SLOWLY, CARRYING WITH IT A HEAVY BURDEN OF MEMORIES...

MOM, DAD, JUDY.. HOW I MISS YOU!

HOW CAN I TELL MARTIN THAT NOT A DAY GOES BY WITHOUT YOU/ ALL HAUNTING MY THOUGHTS!

I LOVED YOU, AND I LOST YOU!

AND I SWEAR, I SWEAR I'LL NEVER LOVE ANYONE AGAIN..

TIME·

ABOARD SCANNER ONE, IT IS TWO DAYS LATER, AS THE HOURS ARE MEASURED IN THIS TIME-LESS VOID.

ALL SET FOR BREAKOUT PROCEDURE, PILOT?

READOUTS SHOW A LIFE-SUPPORTING UNIVERSE AT THE SPECIFIED TIME-LINE COORDINATES, COMMANDER!

ESTIMATED BREAKOUT IN FIVE SECONDS, SHIPBOARD RELATIVE TIME

GO FOR IT, PEREZ

I HAVEN'T TOLD HER-- OR THE OTHERS-- BUT THIS IS OUR LAST CHANCE TO FIND A HABITABLE WORLD!

IF WE COME UP ZERO THIS TIME, I'M TURNING BACK FOR HOMEBASE.

--THREE-- TWO--ONE-- BREAKOUT

GOOD LORD.. IT'S BEAUTIFUL!

BEAUTIFUL ISN'T THE *WORD*, LYDIA.

THIS IS *PARADISE*.

IT--IT'S WHAT WE'VE BEEN *LOOKING* FOR, ALL THESE *MONTHS*!

JUST WHEN WE WERE BEGINNING TO BELIEVE WE'D NEVER *FIND* IT,.

ALL HANDS PREPARE FOR *LANDING*.

PILOT, TAKE HER DOWN!

AND..

IF THIS *ISN'T* PARADISE, IT'S THE NEXT BEST THING.

BUT MAYBE YOU SHOULDN'T DRINK THAT *WATER* UNTIL--

I'VE ALREADY *CHECKED* IT, COMMANDER.

BACTERIA LEVELS *EARTH-NORMAL* IT'S *SAFE*.

THIS WHOLE WORLD'S LIKE A *DREAM*.

INDEED, THE DAY *PASSES* LIKE A DREAM.

AND, WHEN *SUNSET* COMES...

PERFECT-- IT'S ALL SO PERFECT!

NO CIVILIZED *LIFE*--A BEAUTIFUL WORLD, JUST *WAITING* FOR--

BY THE TREE OF BUDDHA!

WHOOOOOOSH!

DON'T UNDERSTAND--MY *MONITORS* SHOWED *NO* INTELLIGENT LIFE-FORMS--!

NEVER TRUST MACHINES, ORION! DON'T YOU *KNOW* THAT?

NO! I WON'T *LET* THEM TAKE THIS AWAY FROM US-- I *WON'T*--!

EASY, LYDIA! DON'T JUMP THE *GUN!*

LET'S SEE *WHO* OUR VISITORS ARE-- AND WHAT THEY *WANT!*

MAYBE THEY'RE JUST THE LOCAL VERSION OF A *WELCOME WAGON!*

OH, *PLEASE*, I CAN'T *STAND* ANOTHER *DISAPPOINTMENT...!*

IT'S JUST SITTING THERE

WATCHING US.

IF THERE'S SOMEONE INSIDE, I WISH THEY'D--

CHHHH

BACK OFF, EVERYONE!

SOME KIND OF TELEPOR-TATION BEAM--!

IDENTIFY YOURSELVES.

BY WHAT RIGHT DO YOU TRESPASS ON THIS PLANET?

WHAT BUSINESS IS IT OF YOURS?

KNOW THAT I AM AVIAR, OF ANTAIRAE, ONE OF THE APPOINTED CUSTODIANS.

I REPEAT: IDENTIFY YOURSELF!

CHAMPION, COMMANDER OF THE ATARI FORCE.

NOW, BEFORE WE GO ANY FURTHER, I INSIST YOU EXPLAIN--

SNIFF

HUKKA-HUKKA

HUKKA!

HUKKA--NIZE--! HUKKA--NIZE!

WH-WHAT SORT OF CREATURE IS THIS?

WHY IS IT LEAPING ON ME? WHAT IS IT GOING TO--?

HUKKA-HUKKA!

IT MAY BE STATING THE OBVIOUS, AVIAR, BUT HE--OR SHE--IS A HUKKA!

AS FOR WHAT THE HUKKA IS DOING, WHY, IT APPEARS HE'S APPROVING OF YOU!

MARTIN, I THINK WE'VE FOUND A FRIEND..

AND SO..

FOLLOW MY ION TRAIL--BUT NOT TOO CLOSELY, COMMANDER

CENTERWORLD IS LESS THAN TWO PARSECS FROM THIS PLANET--

--A FEW HOURS TRAVEL THROUGH WARP SPACE, AND YOU CAN MAKE YOUR CASE TO THE FIRST CUSTODIANS THEMSELVES

WE'VE ACCEPTED THAT YOUR INTENTIONS ARE GOOD, AVIAR THE HUKKA IS NEVER WRONG JUDGING CHARACTER.

BUT WE'D FEEL MORE COMFOR-TABLE--

--IF WE JUST KNEW MORE ABOUT THESE CUSTODIANS YOU KEEP REFERING TO

THE CUSTODIANS OF LIFE ARE THE MOST ETHICAL BEINGS IN THE UNIVERSE, COMMANDER

BUT TO UNDER-STAND THEM--

--YOU MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND OUR COSMOS AS IT WAS BEFORE THEY GAINED AUTHORITY.

WE WERE A GALAXY AT WAR...!

FOR MORE THAN TEN MILLENNIA, DEATH HAD RULED THE PEOPLES OF OUR GALACTIC ISLAND.. DEATH, IN A THOUSAND GUISES, BUT WITH ONE NAME

HATE!

RACE FOUGHT RACE, PLANET DESTROYED PLANET, SOLAR SYSTEM WARRED WITH SOLAR SYSTEM, ALL IN THE NAME OF HATE!

WHO REMEMBERS WHAT PETTY MOTIVES FANNED THE FLAMES OF THOSE ETERNAL WARS?

THE MOTIVES ARE BURIED WITH THE FOOLS WHO PROCLAIMED THEM

ALL THAT REMAINED WAS THE CEASELESS STRUGGLE, SPREADING FROM WORLD TO WORLD LIKE SOME BLACK CONTAGION, AND PERHAPS IT WOULD HAVE CONTINUED FOREVER UNTIL THE LAST LIGHT OF LIFE WAS EXTINGUISHED--

"--BUT, ON A DAY SIX CENTURIES AGO, A FEW BRAVE ONES SAID... 'ENOUGH!'

"AT FIRST, THEY WERE BUT A HANDFUL; THEN OTHERS, SICKENED BY THE ENDLESS FIGHTING, JOINED THEM, AND THE HANDFUL BECAME A SCORE, AND THE SCORE BECAME A HUNDRED, THEN A THOUSAND.

"... AND THE THOUSAND TURNED THEIR BACKS ON THE LEADERS OF THEIR WAR-BLASTED PLANET, AND REFUSED TO WAR ANYMORE!"

"OF COURSE, THE LEADERS DEMANDED THAT THE REFUSERS RETURN."

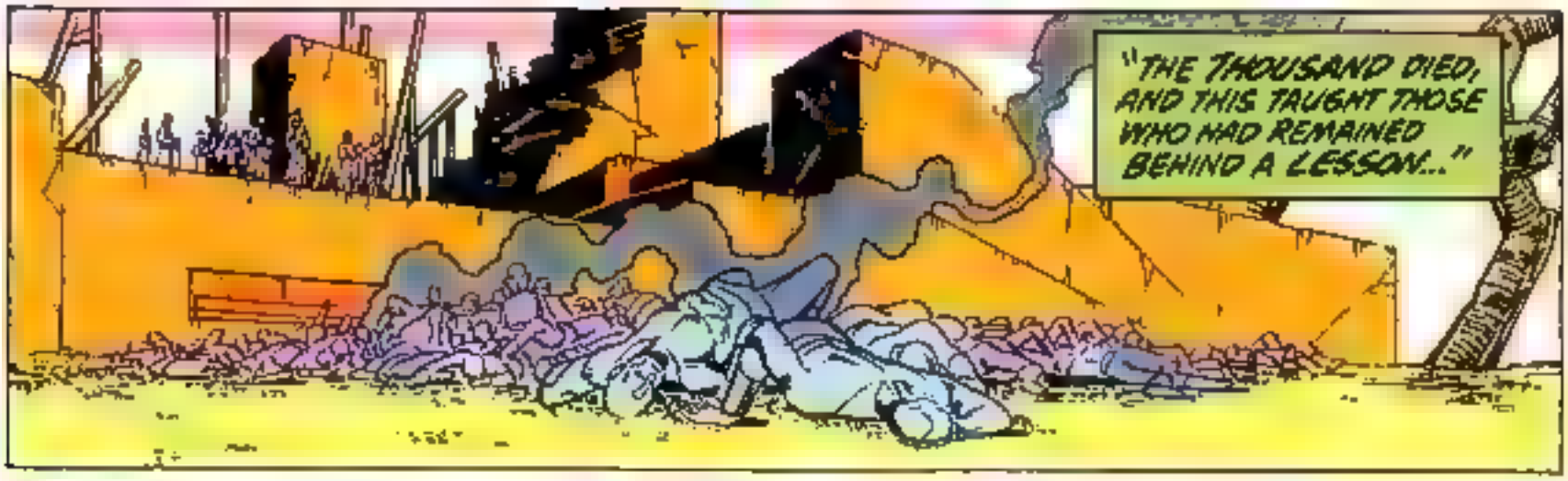
"THEY THREATENED, AND WHEN THREATS FAILED--"

"--THEY DID WHAT CAME NATURALLY."

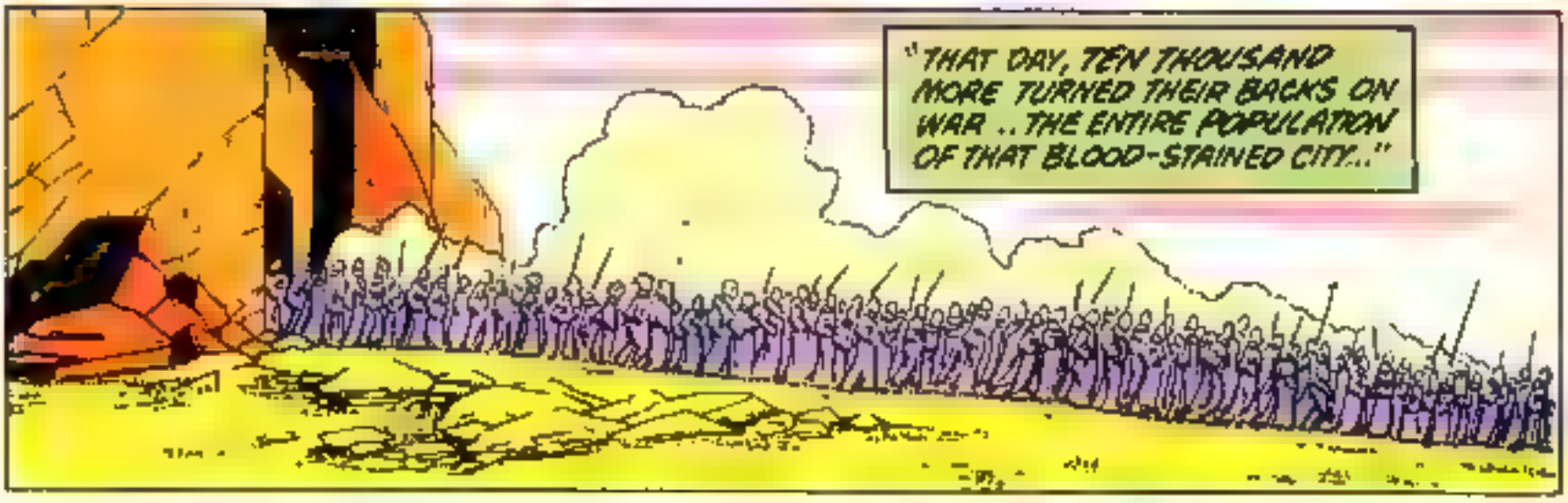
ZAM

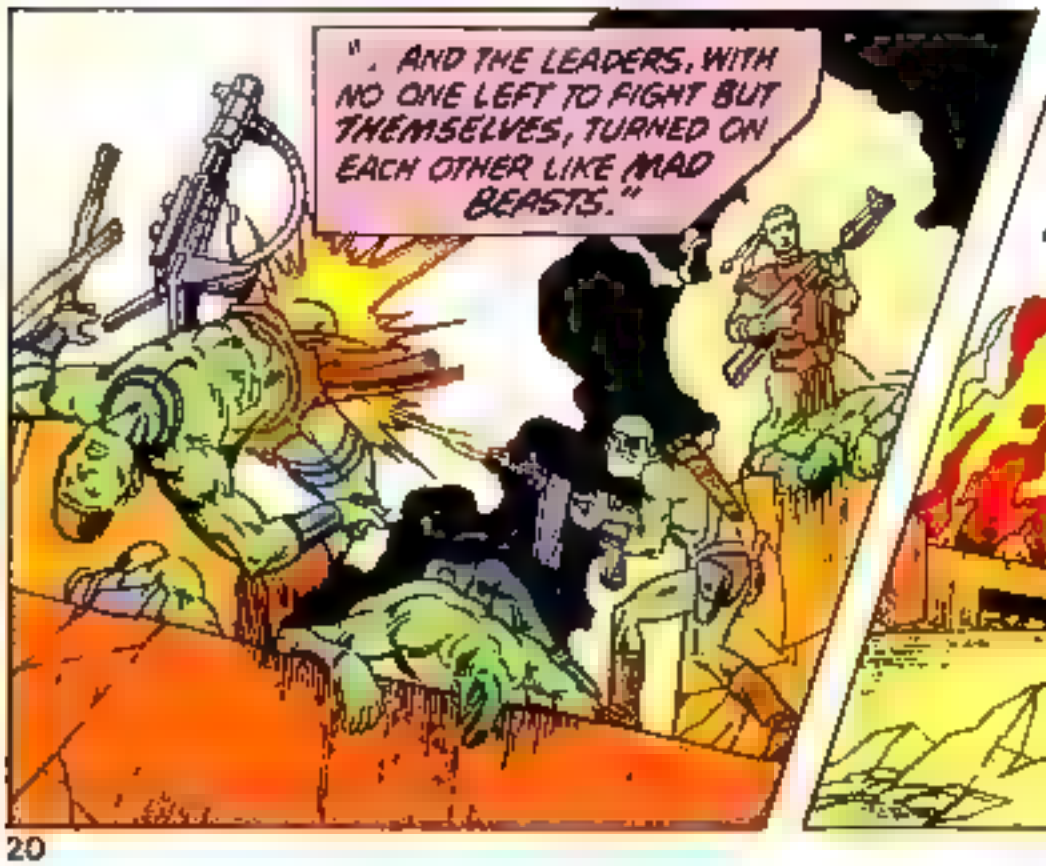
ZAM ZAM

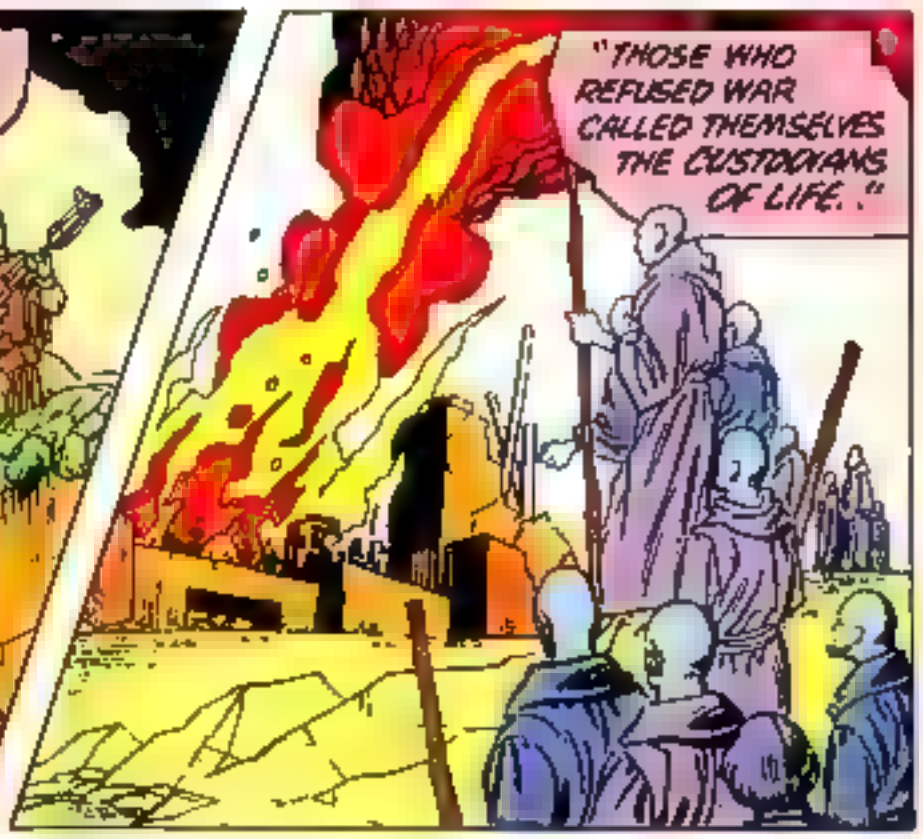
ZAM


"THE THOUSAND DIED, AND THIS TAUGHT THOSE WHO HAD REMAINED BEHIND A LESSON..."

"...BUT NOT THE LESSON THEIR LEADERS HAD INTENDED."


"THAT DAY, TEN THOUSAND MORE TURNED THEIR BACKS ON WAR ..THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF THAT BLOOD-STAINED CITY..."


"...AND THE LEADERS, WITH NO ONE LEFT TO FIGHT BUT THEMSELVES, TURNED ON EACH OTHER LIKE MAD BEASTS."


"THOSE WHO REFUSED WAR CALLED THEMSELVES THE CUSTODIANS OF LIFE."

"... AND THEIR MESSAGE SPREAD FROM WORLD TO WORLD ACROSS THE GALAXY IN A MATTER OF DAYS AND MONTHS.

"EVERYWHERE, THE SURVIVORS OF WAR TURNED THEIR BACKS ON DEATH, EMBRACING LIFE, AND IN HIS DARK CASTLE, DEATH MUST HAVE WAILED WITH HELPLESS FURY.

"SO QUICKLY DID THE MESSAGE SPREAD THAT WITHIN A SOLAR YEAR, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A THOUSAND CENTURIES, THE GALAXY WAS AT PEACE..."

"... AND UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE FIRST CUSTODIANS, WHO WEAR THE SACRED SYMBOL OF STAR AND LEAF, WE HAVE REMAINED AT PEACE ."

" AND HAVE RESTORED THE DREAMS LONG THOUGHT FOREVER DESTROYED."

DOES THIS ANSWER YOU, CHAMPION?

IT DOES.

IS IT POSSIBLE? CAN AN ENTIRE GALACTIC CIVILIZATION EXIST BASED ON PEACE?

WHAT'S WRONG, MARTIN? DOES THE OLD MARINE FIND PEACE SO HARD TO ACCEPT?

I'VE SEEN ENOUGH WAR-- WE ALL HAVE

THAT'S WHY WE BECAME ATARIANS, REMEMBER?

PEACE. IT SOUNDS SO STRANGE, LIKE A CHILD'S FAIRY TALE

MOHANDAS, DO YOU BELIEVE?

MY RELIGION TEACHES THAT ALL NATURE CAN AND MUST LIVE IN HARMONY

I BELIEVE

IS IT OVER, REALLY OVER? ALL THE SEARCHING, ALL THE HOPING...?

IT'S OVER, LYDIA...

.. AND MAYBE, FOR US, SOMETHING ELSE IS FINALLY BEGINNING.

CENTERWORLD.

LIKE A DIAMOND ENCIRCLED BY SMALLER JEWELS, THE VAST HOME PLANET OF THE *UNION FEDERATION* IS SURROUNDED BY GLEAMING *SPACE STATIONS* AND *SATELITES*..

...AND, AFTER *DOCKING* AT ONE SUCH SATELITE FOR *DECONTAMINATION* PROCEDURES...

. *SCANNER ONE* SOON DESCENDS TO THE BRIGHT BLUE PLANET BELOW, ITS CREW *TENSE* WITH ANTICIPATION

. ANTICIPATION COMPOUNDED EQUALLY OF *HOPE* AND *FEAR*.

WHAT IF THEY REJECT OUR *PLEA*, MARTIN?

WHAT IF THE *FIRST CUSTODIANS* WON'T LET HUMANKIND COLONIZE THAT *PARADISE PLANET*?

MARTIN CHAMPION DOES NOT ANSWER, AND HIS *SILENCE* IS AN ELOQUENT EXPRESSION OF THE *WORRY* EACH OF THEM HOLDS SECRETLY IN HIS HEART:

THE WORRY THAT HUMANKIND WILL BE FOUND. *UNWORTHY.*

AVIAR HAS ALREADY *LANDED.*

THAT MUST BE THE *COUNCIL CHAMBER* SHE DESCRIBED -- THE PORT *COMPUTER* IS PILOTING US IN FOR A *LANDING*

ORION, DO THE SENSORS SHOW A *BREATH-ABLE ATMOSPHERE?*

OXYGEN LEVELS ARE NEAR EARTH NORMAL, WITH A HIGHER PROPORTION OF *INERT GASES* THAN WE'RE ACCUSTOMED TO.

IT'LL TASTE LIKE A *SHEET-METAL SHOP,* BUT WE CAN *BREATHE* IT, COMMANDER.

EH? THAT'S *ODD...*

...THE *SENSOR* IS PICKING UP *ANOTHER* LIFE-READING, FROM *SPACE.*

A *TREMENDOUS* CONCENTRATION OF MENTAL AND LIFE-ENERGY.

IT COULD BE ANOTHER *SPACE STATION* -- BUT THE READING INDICATES A *SINGLE ORGANISM.*

VERY, *VERY* ODD.

ORION TO ATARY 8000 COMPUTER

ANALYZE *LIFE READING,* CORROLATE WITH SHIPBOARD *MEMORY BANKS.* REPORT FINDINGS ON *REQUEST.*

AS YOU WISH, DOCTOR; *PROCESSING.*

IT'S PROBABLY NOTHING.

THEN WHY DO I FEEL SO UNEASY?

WHATEVER MISGIVINGS LUCAS ORION MAY FEEL, THEY ARE QUICKLY DISPELLED BY THE WELCOME OF THE CROWD GATHERED ABOUT SCANNER ONE; A WELCOME AS WARM AS THE WARM SUMMER AIR THAT GREETS THEM

BUT THEN, IN THE SPACE BETWEEN ONE INSTANT AND THE NEXT, A CHANGE COMES OVER THE SMILING FACES OF THE CLUSTERING CUSTODIANS OF LIFE...

. . A CHANGE THAT CHILLS THE SUMMER AIR . .

. . LIKE THE PASSING OF A DARK CLOUD BEFORE THE SUN:

INTRUDERS!

MARTIN-- WHAT'S HAPPENING--?

THEIR FACES, LOOK AT THEM--!

THEY'RE GOING CRAZY!

INTRUDERS! TRESPASSERS! KILL THE ALIENS!

KILL THEM ALL!

DOCTOR ORION, THAT LIFE READING YOU WISHED ME TO ANALYZE--

IT'S GONE OFF THE SCALE!

NO.. OH, NO..!

UNFREEZE, ALL OF YOU!

THIS CROWD'S GETTING UGLY! HURRY-- GET BACK TO THE SHIP!

THOK!

KILL! KILL!

YOU HEARD HER, DO IT!

ZZZAK

I'LL BLAST A TRENCH BETWEEN US AND THIS MOB WITH MY COM-LASER--

--BUT IT WON'T HOLD THEM FOR LONG, NOT THE WAY THEY'RE RAGING FOR OUR BLOOD!

I DON'T KNOW HOW-- OR WHY--

--BUT WE'VE OUTSTAYED OUR WELCOME!

PREPARE FOR EMERGENCY TAKE-OFF!

GH-HK!

ZOOM!

IF THIS IS A *PEACE PLANET*, I'D HATE TO SEE A *WARLIKE ONE!*

THAT'S NOT *FAIR*, MARTIN! YOU SAW THEIR *EYES*--

--YOU SAW HOW THEY *CHANGED!*

AS IF SOME *MENTAL FORCE* HAD TAKEN THEM UNDER CONTROL, WIPED THEIR SOULS *CLEAN* IN AN *INSTANT!*

MAYBE-- MAYBE *AVIAR* LED US INTO A *TRAP!*

THE *ALIKKA* COULD HAVE BEEN *WRONG* ABOUT HER-- COULDN'T HE?

THE *ALIKKA* WASN'T WRONG, MARTIN.

PEREZ HAS IT RIGHT A *MENTAL FORCE* TOOK CONTROL

LET ME HOOK UP MY *SENSOR* TO THE *COMPUTER*--

--AND I'LL *SHOW* YOU WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT

WHRRRRR

I NOTICED A VERY STRONG *LIFE READING* OUT IN SPACE, JUST BEFORE WE *DEBARKED.*

THEN, WHEN THE *CUSTODIANS* WENT *BERSERK--*

--THE *SENSOR* PICKED UP A SUDDEN *SURGE OF MENTAL ENERGY* FROM THE ORIGINAL LIFE-SOURCE.

COINCIDENCE, OR *CAUSE-AND-EFFECT?*

PERSONALLY, I DON'T *BELIEVE* IN COINCIDENCES, COMMANDER

NEITHER DO I, DOCTOR.

PEREZ, SET COURSE FOR THAT *LIFE-SOURCE.*

ANY IDEA WHAT WE'RE *FACING*, LUCAS?

THE SHIPBOARD *COMPUTER* WAS TO *ANALYZE* THE SENSOR READINGS, MARTIN.

COMPUTER, DISPLAY YOUR *FINDINGS.*

I HAVE A *BAD FEELING* ABOUT THIS...

OH MY LORD.

ENERGY PATTERN IDENTFIED:
CODE-NAME.
DARK DESTROYER

NO-- IT CAN'T BE!

THE DARK DESTROYER IS DEAD!

IT WAS A HUGE, APPARENTLY UNTHINKING CREATURE WE DISCOVERED IN THE MULTIVERSE, EXISTING BETWEEN DIMENSIONS!

SOMEHOW, IT GAINED MENTAL CONTROL OVER A RACE OF BEINGS CALLED THE ZYLON-- AND THROUGH THEM, DESTROYED THE HUMANOID RACE THAT ONCE LIVED ON THE NUKKA'S HOMEWORLD!

"IT CAUGHT US, ALMOST DESTROYED US, TOO, BUT IN THE END--"

"--WE DESTROYED IT!* HOW CAN IT BE ALIVE? HOW CAN IT BE HERE?

"HOW?"

* SEE THE ATARI STAR RAIDERS CARTRIDGE FOR FURTHER DETAILS.'-- ED.

-- TALKING TO YOU, LYDIA

SNAP OUT OF IT! YOU WERE DAY-DREAMING!

IT WAS MORE LIKE A WAKING NIGHTMARE, MARTIN!

WHAT DO WE DO?

SOMEHOW, THAT-- THING -- MANAGED TO SURVIVE, AND HAS APPEARED HERE, IN THIS UNIVERSE, TO TAKE MENTAL CONTROL OF THE CUSTODIANS.

OKAY, WE "KILLED" IT ONCE BEFORE--

--WE CAN KILL IT AGAIN!

THERE'S ONLY ONE PROBLEM WITH THAT PLAN, MARTIN.

AVIAR AND HER FELLOW CUSTODIANS MIGHT NOT LET US!

"LOOK AT THE MONITORS-- A WHOLE FLEET OF CUSTODIAN SHIPS HAS LAUNCHED FROM CENTERWORLD--

"-- AND IT DOESN'T TAKE MUCH IMAGINATION TO GUESS THAT AVIAR AND HER COLLEAGUES ARE IN THE DARK DESTROYER'S POWER!"

WONDERFUL

SCANNER ONE IS THE BEST ATARI CAN BUILD, BUT CAN EVEN IT TAKE ON AN ENTIRE WAR-FLEET OF GALACTIC CIVILIZATION-BUILT STARSHIPS?

WE'RE ABOUT TO FIND OUT, MARTIN...

THE GALAXIAN VESSELS HAVE WARPED AHEAD OF US.

THEY'RE REAPPEARING BETWEEN US AND OUR DESTINATION, THAT DISTANT ASTEROID PINPOINTED BY OUR COMPUTER AS THE SOURCE OF THE DARK DESTROYER'S LIFE READINGS.

MARTIN, JUST A FEW HOURS AGO, I WOULD HAVE DIED RATHER THAN ADMIT THIS, BUT--

I'M AFRAID!

YOU WANT THE TRUTH, LYDIA?

I'M TERRIFIED!

BATTLE STATIONS!

MOHANDAS SINGH, REPORTING FROM ENGINEERING!

READY FOR ACTION, COMMANDER, THOUGH I PRAY WE CAN AVOID IT!

ORION IN THE MEDI-LAB.

SICKBAY IS IN ORDER AND OPERATIONAL, COMMANDER DON'T GIVE ME REASON TO USE IT.

O'ROURKE AT WEAPONS CONTROL.

ALL SYSTEMS CHECK, COMMANDER GOOD HUNTING!

O'ROURKE, AT MY COMMAND, AIM FOR THEIR *WEAPONS!*

GIVE THE PILOTS *EVERY* CHANCE TO ESCAPE REMEMBER, THEY'RE *POSSESSED* BY THAT *CREATURE* -- THEY'RE NOT *RESPONSIBLE!*

NOW, AT MY *COMMAND*--

FIRE!

BLAM

ZAM!

TWO DOWN, MARTIN--

"--AND THE CUSTODIAN PILOTS ARE ESCAPING IN PROTECTIVE ENERGY ESCAPE PODS!

"BUT, TWO MORE SHIPS ARE SEPARATING FROM THE MAIN FLEET--"

BWHOOM!

WE'RE HIT!

SYNGH, SEND OUT THE REPAIR-ROBS!

--DROPPING INTO ATTACK FORMATION!

WE HAVE TO FALL BACK BEFORE THEY--

TCH-TCH, NO RESPECT FOR MACHINERY

IT'S A DISGRACE, AN INSULT!

TYPICAL HUMAN BEHAVIOR, COMPLETELY INCONSIDERATE.

HOW WOULD THEY LIKE IT IF WE WENT ABOUT BASHING THEM?

BATTLE:

IN A GALAXY THAT HAD KNOWN PEACE FOR MORE THAN SIX CENTURIES, WAR IS REBORN, AND DEEP WITHIN THE SEEMINGLY LIFELESS ASTEROID WHICH IS AT THE CENTER OF THIS NEW COMBAT--

--SOMETHING STIRS, AND RISES, LIKE A FLOWER OPENING ITS PETALS TO THE DAWNING SUN:

GOOD... IT IS GOOD TO TASTE THE MENTAL ANGUISH OF VIOLENT DEATH, AGAIN!

WHEN I WAS TRANSPORTED TO THIS DIMENSION--AGAINST MY WILL--I WAS TOO WEAK TO STIR THE HATREDS OF THESE PLANT "PEACEFUL" PEOPLES

WITHOUT THEIR TORMENT AND PAIN TO FEED ME, I WASTED AWAY, ALMOST DIED.

THEN..THE HUMANS CAME! THE HUMANS, WHOSE ATTEMPT TO SLAY ME FORCED ME TO FLEE TO THIS WORTHLESS DIMENSION!

THE HUMANS ARE AN EMOTIONAL RACE THE TASTE OF THEIR FEAR SUSTAINED ME.

THEIR PASSION GAVE ME STRENGTH TO STIR THE PASSIONS OF THESE SELF-STYLED CUSTODIANS...

...AND THROUGH THEM, TO WREAK VENGEANCE ON THE HUMANS THEMSELVES!

STRANGE, THAT I CAN FEED ON THE HUMANS' EMOTIONS..

...YET CANNOT SEEM TO GRASP THEIR MINDS!

YET, NOW THE TIDE TURNS IN THEIR FAVOR...

... SO I MUST PREPARE, IN THE UNLIKELY CASE THAT ONCE MORE I FACE DEFEAT...!

COMMANDER, IS IT MY FEVERED IMASINATION--

--OR ARE WE WINNING?

ZAM

ZAMM

IT'S NO DREAM, MOHANDAS! BELIEVE IT OR NOT, ONE SHIP AGAINST A HUNDRED--

--WE'RE BEATING THEM!

ZAMM

BZAM!

FINAL APPROACH:

LIKE A HAWK SWOOPING IN ON ITS PREY, SCANNER ONE SWINGS ABOUT AND DIVES TOWARD THE TARGET ASTEROID, EVERY MEMBER OF ITS CREW COMMITTED TO ONE GOAL-

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE DARK DESTROYER!

YET, EVEN AS THEY PLUNGE THROUGH SPACE, AN UNSEEN ECTOPLASMIC TENDRIL PROBES FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE BLEAK PLANETOID, LIKE A QUESTING HAND--

--AND WHOMEVER IT ATTACHES FEELS A WAVE OF BLACK NAUSEA, LIKE THE SUDDEN RISING TIDE OF AN EVIL SEA-

IT IS THE *MENTAL ESSENCE* OF THE *DARK DESTROYER*, AND FOR AN *INSTANT*, FOUL AND INDESCRIBABLE *EVIL* PERVADES THE HEARTS OF ALL ABOARD--

--BUT IT DOES NOT *LAST*, FOR THE *DARK DESTROYER* CANNOT *CONTROL* THESE CREATURES CALLED *HUMAN BEINGS*; THEIR MINDS ARE TOO *ALIEN*, THEIR EMOTIONS TOO *RAW*.

AND SO, THE *MENTAL TENDRIL* PROBES ON, SEEKING ONE WHO *CAN* BE CONTROLLED.

AND *FINDING* THAT ONE, AMID THE GLEAMING INSTRUMENTS OF THE HEALER'S ART, IN LUCAS ORION'S *SICKBAY*...

KILL

THAT SCREAM BEFORE SHE PASSED OUT..

..SOUNDED LIKE SOMEONE'S DYING CRY!

IF SHE WAS UNDER THE DESTROYER'S MENTAL CONTROL, THAT MUST MEAN--

IT'S DEAD!

YOU DID IT, COMMANDER!

WE ALL DID IT, O'ROURKE-- WORKING TOGETHER, AS A TEAM!

LYDIA, TURN THIS SHIP AROUND!

WE'VE GOT SOME PEOPLE TO TALK TO-- ABOUT A NEW HOME..!

AND SO, SCANNER ONE RETRACES ITS PATH TO CENTER-WORLD, BUT PERHAPS IT LEAVES TOO SOON.

. FOR, IF IT HAD REMAINED BUT A MOMENT LONGER, ITS CREW WOULD HAVE SEEN A STRANGE ORGANIC NODULE SPINNING THROUGH SPACE, AWAY FROM THE BLASTED ASTEROID'S SCATTERING DEBRIS...

. AND PERHAPS, THEY MIGHT HAVE WONDERED..

CENTERWORLD.

I THINK WE'RE A HIT, COMMANDER

WE STILL HAVE TO GET APPROVAL FROM THE FIRST CUSTODIANS, SINGH.

MARTIN, THEY MUST ACCEPT US!

AFTER ALL WE'VE BEEN THROUGH--!

BUT--

AVIAR, WE HAVE LISTENED, BUT ARE UNCONVINCED.

THIS IS A VIOLENT, WARLIKE SPECIES.

A WHISPERED CONSULTATION, AND THEN,..

HUMANS, WE HAVE DECIDED.

SO WERE OUR ANCESTORS, FIRST CUSTODIAN, AND YET THEY FOUND IT IN THEMSELVES TO REFUSE WAR

THESE HUMANS HAVE HAD A VIOLENT HISTORY-- BUT THEY WISH TO START ANEW.

CAN WE DENY THEM THEIR CHANCE, AFTER THEY HAVE SAVED US FROM EVIL UNIMAGINABLE?

YOU WILL BE PERMITTED TO COLONIZE THE PLANET DESIGNATED 11435-18-2, UNDER TERMS OF PROBATION

WELCOME TO THE UNION FEDERATION OF WORLDS.

HUKKA-HUKKA!

I--I CAN'T QUITE BELIEVE IT. I'M HAVING TROUBLE CATCHING MY BREATH!

IS IT TRUE?

IT'S TRUE, LUCAS!

WE'VE FOUND A NEW HOME!

A NEW HOME..

AS THE WORD GOES OUT, A CHEER ROARS THROUGH THE WAITING CROWD, THE COLLECTIVE VOICE OF A THOUSAND DIFFERENT RACES WELCOMING ANOTHER

THANK YOU.

SIX MONTHS LATER, ON THE WAR-WEARY WORLD CALLED EARTH, A FATEFUL *COUNTDOWN* REACHES CLIMAX

THREE...

TWO...

ONE...

MULTIVERSE DRIVE ACTIVATED!

EXODUS ONE IS AWAY!

THERE THEY GO, LYDIA, THE FIRST SHIPLOAD OF *COLONISTS* FOR *NEW EARTH*--

--TWO THOUSAND MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN LOADED IN *SUSPENDED ANIMATION* TANKS, CROWDED INTO THE *CARGO BAY* OF THE OLD *SCANNER ONE*

THEY'VE GONE TO SLEEP ON A WORLD *RUINED* BY WAR

...AND THEY'LL *WAKE* ON A PLANET FRESH WITH THE *PROMISE* OF PEACE.

ANOTHER FEW MONTHS, AND WE'LL *FOLLOW* THEM.

WE'LL BE ABLE TO *START OVER*--

EH?

GO AFTER HER, MARTIN.

YOU'VE LET HER *RUN AWAY* FROM YOU FOR TOO LONG.

LYDIA...!

AND SO...

--THAT'S ALL OF IT, MARTIN.

I LOST LOVE ONCE--

--AND I COULD NEVER *BEAR* THAT KIND OF HURT AGAIN.

WHEN YOU SAID WE COULD *START OVER*-- I THOUGHT ABOUT MY PARENTS, MY SISTER. THEY *CAN'T* START OVER.

THEY'RE THE *PAST*, LYDIA. *WE* HAVE TO LIVE IN THE FUTURE.

I WANT *YOU* IN *MY* FUTURE, LYDIA.

I WANT TO START OVER WITH *YOU*...

THE END...

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